

Enchanted St. Vincent's Isle. Florida's Oldest Game Farm

1930-1942

St. Vincent's Has Had But Three Owners Since The Civil War

(By DEWITT LAMB)

Florida's oldest game preserve is in Franklin county, and located on St. Vincent's island, about eight miles west of Apalachicola.

This famous island was originally a part of the large tract of land known as the Forbes purchase, bought from the Indians while Florida belonged to Spain. Under the United States, the Forbes title became a subject of litigation. Since the supreme court confirmed it in 1835, the present title descends in a short and simple chain. The island's ownership now rests with a son of the late Dr. R. V. Pierce, originator of the Dr. Pierce patent medicines.

The Masonic grand lodge once considered paying a million dollars for the island for the purpose of building there a large hospital and other buildings. During the land boom of 1925 St. Vincent's island was exploited but it now is being gradually developed and protected as a private lodge and a winter retreat for the owner, who invites a number of guests during the season to share in the hunting and fishing, said to be the best in the United States.

The island is only a short distance off shore from the mainland. It is nine miles long and about four miles wide at its greatest width. Numerous fresh water lakes, ponds, and creeks indent the surface of the heavily wooded interior. There are fully 600 wild deer in these woodlands. Fresh waters that have hardly been fished, afford some of the most exciting sport ever found for the angler with hook and line and rod and reel.

Several dwelling houses, a few small cottages, and other improvements are maintained on the island. It is reached by a short boat trip from the mainland. The Gulf Coast Scenic highway, state road 10, passes along the coast line within a mile of the island. It is easily accessible.

Until less than 20 years ago the island had been but partially utilized as a cattle ranch, supplying beef to Apalachicola, but it had been long famous in all that section of northwest Florida for its deer, wild ducks, geese, and its fish and oysters. This reputation led to its purchase by the present owner for preservation and improvement as a game preserve.

In order to give the wild deer full advantages, all the cattle have been killed off. A few roads have been built. Ditches have been dug so that boats can reach isolated ponds. Wild rice has been planted for food. An artesian well affords safe drinking water. Dams preserve the ponds and prevent their being filled with salt water or going dry in prolonged

drought. Thousands of acres of the finest pine and hardwood timber in the state are found on the island. The largest and finest oysters in the gulf are found within a few rods of the island. Many wild hogs roam the jungles, and these afford good shooting and excitement for the hunter.

St. Vincent's island has been owned since the Civil war by only three proprietors, all of whom protected the wild turkey, deer, waterfowl, and other game. The big Sambar deer has been imported from Indian and successfully bred and crossed with the native deer.

St. Vincent's island enjoys the distinction of being the only real game preserve in sub-tropical America; and the only one on which any of the large game animals of the old world are being acclimated. In at least a score of different ways it is an island of novelties and delights.

The island was bought from Col. E. P. Alexander by Dr. Raymond V. Pierce, father of the present owner. Col. Alexander was president of the Georgia Central railroad, and bought the property from Col. George H. Hatch, who was at one time democratic mayor of Cincinnati.

Col. R. J. Floyd appears to have been the first individual owner of St. Vincent's island. He was a prominent Apalachicola lawyer. Gabriel Floyd, his son, married Sarah Gorrie, daughter of Dr. John Gorrie, whose fame is well known and widespread. Gabriel Floyd was afterwards made a captain in the Confederate army and lost his life in a battle in Virginia. It was from Col. Floyd that Col. Hatch acquired title to the island.

During the Civil war the island was forfeited and used as a garrison. Several hundred men were stationed there. Some of these men died and were buried on the island. Col. Floyd and Col. Hatch both are buried on the island, and their graves are plainly marked. The old fort also is still in evidence, but reduced by the weather and the march of time.

Pheasants didn't take to the climate and died off.

Since the elder Pierce died several years ago, there has been little hunting on the island because his heirs don't have his enthusiasm for game.

J. C. Wall, manager of St. Vincent's for the Pierce estate, estimates there are between 1,500 and 2,000 deer on the island now, and in its five lakes—four of them fresh water, one brackish—there are enough fish to make any angler's eyes pop.

"There are more fish right here than in any other body of water in Florida," said Wall, whose family is one of three that live on the island to protect the Pierce property and keep off unwanted hunters.

No one ever tries to catch the plentiful bream and shell-crackers, because these fish like earthworm

Tec

B

In

Official
Mag

O

(From

The c
Gorrie
in the
way will
pomp a
people o
neighbor
thousan
monial
whenn i
thereaft
bridge.

The s
plete ar
only the
pavemen
days fo

The
reached
way, be
No. 10
in leng
the bay
eastern
(hydrau
across
the ger
extends
the bay
bridge s

The c
for a le
a serie
interloc
landing
there b
spans o
gle spa
passage
spans
timber
of the
and an
into th
bay. T
ever, a
with a
feet.

five sta
concret
drivewa

Follow
structu
similar
shore
reaching
ing the
lachoic
spans
channe
three
and 67

central
of 284
electric
open i

utes, g
feet wi
tral piv

All p
are of
here is
Twelve
short v
ment e
Avenue